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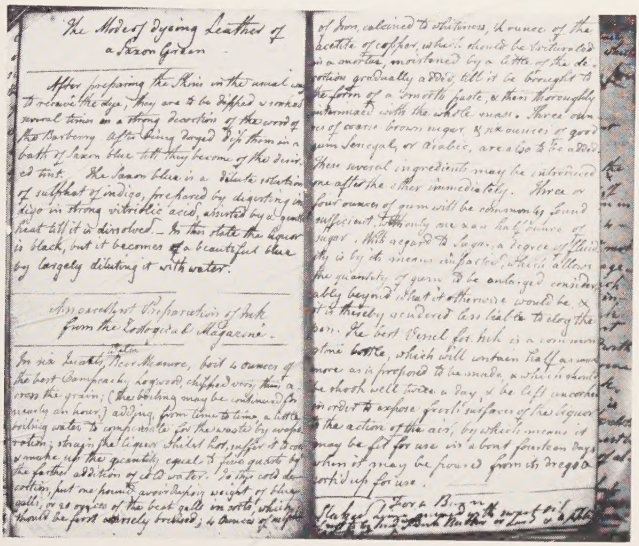
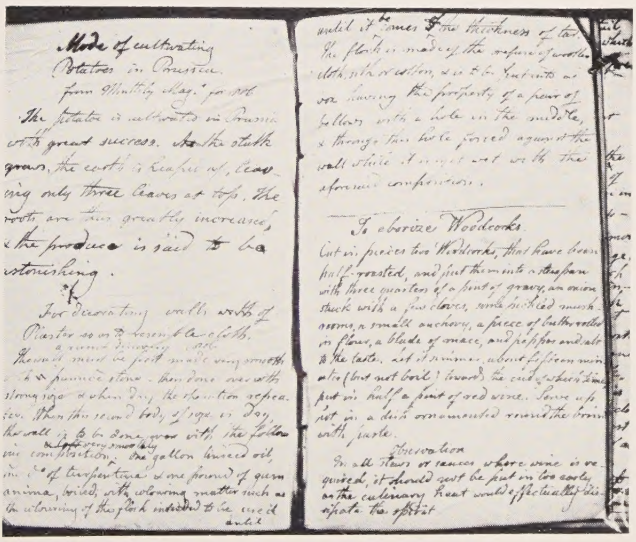


The Mode of dyeing Leathers of a Saxon Green

After preparing the Skin in the usual manner to receive the dye, they are to be dipped several times in a strong decoction of the seed of the barberry after being deeply dyed of them in a bath of Saxon blue till they become of the desired tint. The Saxon blue is a dilute solution of sulphat of indigo, prepared by digesting indigo in strong vitriolic acid, assisted by a gentle heat till it is dissolved. In this state the liquor is black, but it becomes of a beautiful blue by largely diluting it with water.

An excellent Composition of Ink From the Edinburgh Magazine.

In six Quarts Rain Water, boil 4 ounces of the best Campeach, reduced, chipped very thin across the grain; (The boiling may be continued for nearly an hour) adding, from time to time, a little boiling water to compensate for the waste by evaporation; strain the Liquor whilst hot, suffer it to cool & make up the quantity equal to five quarts by the further addition of cold water. To this cold decoction, put one pound, avoirdupois, weight of the best galls, or 12 ounces of the best galls in nuts, which should be first correctly bruised, 4 ounces of sulphat of Iron, calcined to whiteness, 4 ounces of the Acetite of copper, which should be triturated in a mortar, moistened by a little of the decoction gradually added, till it be brought to the form of a smooth paste, & then thoroughly intermixed with the whole mass. Three ounces of coarse brown sugar, & six ounces of good gum Senegal, or Arabic, are also to be added. These several ingredients may be introduced one after the other immediately. Three or four ounces of gum will be sufficient if only one half the above quantity of sugar. With regard to sugar, a degree of fluidity is by no means important, which allows the quantity of gum to be enlarged considerably beyond what it otherwise would be, as it thereby rendered less liable to decay the pen. The best Penal Ink is a common glass bottle, which will contain half as much more as is proposed to be made, & when shaken well twice a day, & be left uncorked in order to expose a small surface of the liquor to the action of the air, by which means it may be fit for use in about fourteen days when it may be poured from its dregs into a well stopped bottle for use.



Mode of cultivating Potatoes in Prussia. From Whitby Mag. for 1788

The potatoe is cultivated in Prussia with great success. As the stalk grows, the earth is heaped up, leaving only three leaves at top. The roots are thus greatly increased, & the produce is said to be astonishing.

For decorating walls with the Quarter so as to resemble Cloth.

A round drawing table.

The wall must be first made very smooth & of pumice stone. Then done over with strong size & when dry the operation repeated. When the second body of size is dry, the wall is to be done over with the following composition. One gallon linseed oil, one lb of turpentine & one pound of gum animi, boiled with colouring matter such as the colouring of the flesh intended to be used and

united it to ounces of the thickness of tar. The flesh is made of the capture of woollen cloth, silk or cotton, & is to be cut into as to answer the property of a pair of bellows with a hole in the middle, & through this hole forced again it the wall while it is yet not with the aforesaid composition.

To abbreviate Woodcocks

Cut in pieces two Woodcocks, that have been half roasted, and put them into a Stew pan with three quarters of a pint of gravy, an onion stuck with a few cloves, some pickled mushrooms, a small anchovy, a piece of butter rolled in flour, a blade of mace, and pepper and salt to the taste. Let it simmer about half an hour after (but not boil) & add the juice of a lemon & put in half a pint of red wine. Serve up hot in a dish ornamented round the brim with parsley.

Observation

In all stews or sauces where wine is required, it should not be put in too early as the culinary heat would effectually evaporate the spirit

RICHARD ALSOP AND HIS UNIVERSAL RECEIPT BOOK

By Lawrence B. Romaine

"Among the collections of the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Mass., is a quaint little volume, the title page of which reads as follows:—*The / Universal / Receipt Book / or / Complete Family Directory: / being a / Repository / of Useful Knowledge in the / Several Branches of Domestic Economy / containing scarce, curious and valuable / Receipts, and Choice Secrets. / by a Society of Gentlemen in New-York.* / New-York: / Published by I. Riley, No. 4 City Hotel. / Van Winkle and Wiley, Printers. / 1814. Who composed 'the Society of Gentlemen in New-York' it may be impossible any longer to know with certainty. Tradition has it in some quarters, that at least one of them was Richard Alsop." (Karl P. Harrington. *Richard Alsop A Hartford Wit.* Middletown, Conn. 1939).

Although the Rev. D. D. Field attributes this work to Richard Alsop in his *Statistical History of Middlesex County*, written and published in 1819, no other compilation even mentions his name in connection with its authorship. From the *Dictionary of American Biography* to Allibone's *Critical Dictionary of English Literature* there is no mention of it whatever, and even Mr. Harrington sounds extremely doubtful that he even had a part in it.

Since Mr. Harrington's biography is the only complete, readable and factual work on Richard Alsop, I shall rely on him for other statements used in these notes. His contradiction of errors in the *Dictionary of American Biography* are many and conclusively proven. Although he suggests that the idea of publishing a small volume of practical recipes of the period might well have appealed not only to Mr. Riley, his brother-in-law publisher, but also to Mr. Alsop, whose finances were at this time none too satisfactory, he apparently felt that there was nothing to back up such a statement. At last in 1953 this necessary proof has come to light and I feel it my duty to throw the facts on the screen of American bibliography.

In the bottom drawer of an old printer's cabinet in a leaking barn, nestled in downy mouse beds of carefully chewed Revolutionary letters and documents, lay an old calf bound notebook. For some strange reason the mice had neglected it, or perhaps they were saving it for 1954—or perhaps they were too lazy to work on the covers—no matter. This notebook, entirely in Richard Alsop's hand, has been rescued and now lives to defend its author against the Society of Gentlemen who have for so long denied him the rightful ownership of his *Universal Receipt Book.*

The skeptics may of course feel that just because a man collects old recipes in a notebook is no reason to believe that he ever compiled or wrote a book of or about them. Under cross examination, the notebook confesses to a library, books bought and sold, expences and ornithology. His lists of birds seen, taken and mounted from 1777 to 1805 with remarks about Alexander Wilson's visit to Middletown may now be read in the *Massachusetts Audubon Bulletin* for February 1953. One might say that the recipes were jotted down for his wife, or for his own use as handy-man about his home. On the other hand, according to Mr. Harrington, Richard Alsop was a dreamer, a reader and an author—not a handy-man at all. Business and work were not his fortes. I am convinced that he wrote these recipes, for

almost everything under the sun, with the idea in the back of his head that one day they might prove to be a rather pleasant and lucrative proposition.

Many of these recipes are word for word in both notebook and print. Again, the doubting Thomas may point out, and justifiably, that those he so carefully copied from earlier English works might also have been copied by the Society of Gentlemen. This is true and possible, yet so many of them are obviously either his own, or unwritten lore of his Connecticut neighbors, that I shall ignore the thought and leave it to the manuscript itself to prove my proposition.

Suppose you take the *Universal Receipt Book*, and I the notebook, and we peruse them together. On page three of the notebook we find the following:—

"Varnish for Prints, Boxes, Drawings etc.—

Take Canada Balsam, or Balsam of Fir, boil it to a consistence & dilute it with spirits of Turpentine—A Varnish for coloured drawings & prints, so as to give them the appearance of oil paintings. From the Monthly Magazine for 1810. Take of Canada Balsam an ounce, spirit of Turpentine 2 oz. & mis them well together. Before applying the mixture the prints should be sized with a solution of isinglass in water, & when dry apply the varnish with a brush."

On page 6 of the *Universal Receipt Book*, you will find the same identical recipe, perhaps rewritten and brushed up a bit for publication:—

"A Varnish for coloured Prints or Drawings, so as to give them the appearance of Oil Paintings. From the M. Magazine for 1810. Take of Canada Balsam (or balsam of fir) one ounce—of spirit of turpentine two ounces; mix them well together. Before applying this composition, the print or drawing should be sized with a solution of isinglass in water, and suffered to remain until perfectly dry. The varnish is then to be put on carefully with a brush."

Can you doubt the probability? It seems to me perfectly obvious that the notes hastily written about 1810 were corrected for the 1814 printing by author and publisher to make them more readable and professional sounding. Alsop had the idea and Riley liked it.

Passing by the destruction of bugs, baits for rats, gilding paper, waterproofing leather and the prevention of rust in metals, we come to a recipe that I think bears reprinting not only for further proof of authorship but for educational value and amusement:—

"The Mode of dyeing Leather of a Saxon Green.

After preparing the Skins in the usual way to recieve the dye, they are to be dipped & soaked several times in a strong decoction of the wood of the Barberry. After being dried, dip them in a bath of Saxon blue till they become the desired tint. The Saxon blue is a dilute solution of sulphat of indigo prepared by dissolving indigo in strong vitriolic acid, assisted by a gentle heat till it be dissolved. In this state, the liquor is black but becomes a beautiful blue by largely diluting with water."

This recipe in the book is the same but for the addition of such words as "beautiful" Saxon green, "mode" substituted for way, and "copiously" for largely. The only changes are obvious editing. There is no origin given for this one and I think it highly probable that Mr. Alsop experimented in dyes as he did in the art of taxidermy.

On the same page, in exactly the same sequence as they appear in the book, we find a rather long and interesting recipe for ink. There were at this time a great many inventions of ink, both good and bad. In the manuscript, he credits the *Zoological Magazine*, but in the book no source is mentioned. The details are amusing. Let me read the lines in the notebook:—

"An Excellent Preparation of Ink from the Zoological Magazine—In six quarts of water, Beer measure, boil 4 oz. of the best Campeachy logwood, chipped very thin across the grain—(the boiling may be continued for nearly an hour) adding from time to time a little boiling water to compensate for the waste by evaporation—Strain the liquor whilst hot, suffer it to cool & make up the quantity equal to five qts. by the farther addition of cold water. In this cold decoction put one pound avoirdupois weight of blue galls, or 20 ozs. of the best galls in sorts, which should be first coursely bruised; 4 oz. of sulphat of Iron, calcined to whiteness, ½ oz. of acetate of copper, which should be triturated in a mortar, moistened by a little of the decoction gradually added till it be brought to the form of a smooth paste & then thoroughly intermixed with the whole mass. Three oz. of course brown sugar & six ounces of good Gum Senegal, or Arabic, are also to be added. These several ingredients may be introduced one after the other immediately. Three or four ounces of gum will be commonly found to be sufficient with only an oz. and a half of sugar. With regard to sugar, a degree of fluidity is by its means imparted, which allows the quantity of gum to be enlarged considerably beyond what it otherwise would be & it is thereby rendered less laible to clog the pen. The vessel for Ink is the common stone bottle which will contain half as much as is proposed to be made & which should be shook well twice a day & be left uncorked in order to expose fresh surfaces of the liquor to the action of air, by which means it may be fit for use in about fourteen days when it may be poured from its dregs & cork'd up for use."

The book follows the manuscript but again shows further thought, better terminology and construction. The editors created a few fine touches such as "purple tinge" and the "easy flow" from the pen. The reference to the Magazine is a bit indefinite and I have not had time to hunt it up to see just how closely it was copied. I think some of it may have been original with our Connecticut Bard. If he made the ink with which he wrote, I must admit that it was worth the study and work.

"Cure for a Felon—said to be certain.

Take a piece of Rock Salt about the size of a Butter Nut & wrap it up in a green cabbage leaf—if not to be had, in a piece of wet brown paper. Lay it in the embers and cover it up as if to roast; after about 20 minutes, take it out and powder it as fine as possible. Take hard soap & mix the powdered salt with so much of the soap as will make a salve. If the soap contains but little turpentine which may be known by the smell, then add a little turpentine, but if it smells pretty strong, none need be added. Apply the salve to the part affected & it will in a short time totally destroy it & remove the pain—published by the special desire of a person who had used it sucessfully for years."

The book text follows the mss. accurately except for the matter of publishing the account, which appears at the beginning instead of the end of the recipe. As you can see, Mr. Alsop leads us a merry chase from the fine arts

and crafts through cookery and medicine and could well leave us in the throes of distemper with an indecipherable veterinarian remedy. Remember, I am only trying to select from some 150 recipes, those that match most accurately as well as those that are most amusing, interesting and readable. Let us give him a chance at architecture and interior decoration:—

"For decorating walls of Plaster so as to resemble Cloth.

A recent discovery—1806. The wall must first be made very smooth with pumice stone—then done over with a strong size & when dry, the operation repeated. When the second body of size is dry, the wall is to be done over with the following composition very smoothly. One gallon linseed oil, one gal. Turpentine & one pound of gum anima, boiled with coloring matter such as the coloring of the flock to be used, until it comes to the thickness of tar. The flock is made of the refuse of woolen cloth, silk or cotton & is to be put into a box having the property of a pair of bellows with a hole in the middle & through the hole poured against the wall while it is yet wet with the aforesaid composition."

Mr. Alsop states that this process was first discovered in 1806 and notes that it was used in Paris. It is not given in *Valuable Secrets in Arts, Trades etc. adapted to the United States* (various editions 1795-1816), *The Artist & Tradesman's Guide* (1827-1829), *The House Servant's Directory—etc.—with full instructions for cleaning Plate, Brass, Steel, Glass and Mahogany; and likewise patent and common lamps with upwards of 100 Receipts; with friendly advise to Cooks, and complete directions how to burn Lehigh Coal. etc.* (1827) or *The Mysteries of Trade; with practical observations on the Useful Arts* (1825). This was a period of discovery in arts and crafts and many volumes were published for the benefit of the artisan and the general public. The four mentioned covered almost everything from catching bedbugs to the uses of whale oil. I have studied and collected many of them yet know there are still others with which I am not familiar. Nina Fletcher Little, author of *American Decorative Wall Painting 1700-1850* (Old Sturbridge Village & Studio Publications 1952), does not seem to have found it in print in her exhaustive research in this field. It seems to me quite reasonable to call this an Alsop discovery.

Repetition in advertising is good sound business, and I am applying the same theory in trying to hammer home my convictions about this authorship. From the sublime consideration of tinted walls and pastel colors we pass now to the beer garden. I assure you there was nothing our friend did not jot down, and, of course, with the idea always foremost of publishing a book. Who was Doctor Cogswell?

"Doct. Cogswell's Receipt for Hop Beer. (In the book, Dr. Cogswell is not mentioned, as you will see, and the heading is 'Excellent Hop Beer'). For a half barrel take ½ lb. of hops and ½ gal. of Mollasses, the Mollasses to be poured by itself into the barrel—boil the hops with a Teacupfull of Ginger in about a pailfull and a ½ of water, viz. a sufficient quantity to extract the virtue of the hops—put it up warm into the barrel shaking it well to mix it up with the Mollasses & then fill it up with water quite to the bung, which leave open to allow it to work, & be careful to keep it constantly filled up with water whenever it works over—when it is sufficiently worked to be bottled putting about a spoonful of molasses in each bottle."

I can not recommend this to you without trying it. The last time I remember making beer from some friend's recipe, we nearly blew up the house. If you wish to try it, go ahead, but please remember that all I guaranteed was that the recipe was jotted down by Richard Alsop in a little calf notebook in preparation for his book about 1805. The blood of such an experiment be on your own head.

The next secret in these early arts and crafts is well pruned for publication, though unquestionably identical in content. Another conclusive proof that the author of the manuscript was the author of the book. There is no source given in either notes or printing, and I believe it was evolved through his own experience. Do I give you a picture of this Connecticut sportsman, naturalist-poet and taxidermist painstakingly jotting down the steps in his work—and later rewriting them more carefully for the 1814 production?

"To make Gun Barrells of a fine Brown.

Rub the barrell bright with sandpaper, or if bright, with Brick Dust to take off any greaseiness, fitting a piece of wood in the muzzle to hold it by. (This handy little suggestion, for example, is omitted in the text.) Bruise roughly about half an ounce of Brimstone and sprinkly it upon a gentle fire. Hold the barrell over the smoke, turning it backwards & forwards until it becomes equally tinged, when set in a cellar or a damp room till the next day, when it will be covered with a fine rust. Spread it over evenly with your finger & let it stand another day. If you then percieve any parts of it which have not taken, scour them bright and repeat the process. Next polish it with a hard brush rubbed with Bees wax & afterwards with a dry woolen or rough linen rag. This rubbing must be repeated every day while it continues to throw out any roughness. No oil must be put to it for some time, as it may bring off the rust, but if it becomes so rough as not to be got off with common rubbing, wipe it over with oil & rub it off with a linen rag & next day again polish it off with the brush."

The added suggestion in the book for the use of a piece of soft pine wood instead of the hard brush sounds like early 19th century Connecticut Yankee ingenuity. It somehow doesn't fit the authorship of a Society of Gentlemen in New-York, even in 1814. I hope this appeals to you as a very stout nail in their coffin, and that with a few more hammered home, you will agree to have them decently buried.

Returning to medicine again, having already cured a felon, let Mr. Alsop rescue you from the bite of a mad dog:

"Certain Cure for the Bite of a Mad Dog: from the London Chirurgical & Medical Review, in which it is recommended to the faculty & others, as an efficacious remedy for the bite & a sure preventative of the Hydrophobia. A receipt of John Webb for the Bite of a Mad Dog. (This heading is carefully condensed in the book.) Take the leaf of the tender bud of rue half a large teacup full when cut quite small, the cup to hold a quarter of a pint, beer measure; take the same quantity of large of common garden box, also cut small; add nine leaves of red sage cut small—let them be without a blemish. Take a half pint of new wheat meal from the mill, or good fine flour & about one tablespoon of yeast; mix it together as a dough; let it lie about half an hour, then bake or broil it. Take one third of it in milk every morning. This quantity for a man or

> woman same for a sheep, hog or dog, but for a cow or horse, double the quantity of the rue and box, but only nine leaves of sage—this in milk or some other fluid. Half the quantity of rue and box will answer for a calf or colt, but there *must* [be] nine leaves of the sage. My father has cured some men when mad (Feb. 27, 1807) he took a teacup full of rue & another of box and nine leaves of sage and boiled in a pint of milk & give it as quick as possible. Half the quantity will do for a small child but there *must* be nine leaves of sage. The herb called Scullcap has lately been discovered to be a cure for this disorder when taken in season."

Whether this leaves us "at sixes and sevens" or at "teacups and nines," I care not, so long as you agree with me that Richard Alsop scribbled this in his notebook about 1808 with the express purpose of some day compiling the *Universal Receipt Book.*

There are recipes for whitening ivory and for staining ivory that are printed verbatim from the manuscript, and many others of small interest to us both, as recipes today. There are practical suggestions for stopping cracks in iron culinary utensils, all of which prove solidly that the author was more likely a man with a country background than a literary society from the "big city." The number of recipes concerning books, illustrations and prints is also indicative and I think one will bear reprinting.

> "M. Deschamp's Mode to Extract Grease Spots from Prints, Books or Writings.
>
> Warm the paper moderately, and extract as much of the oily substance with which it is stained as possible by the application of blotting paper. Then dip a small brush or hair pencil in the oil of highly rectified spirits of turpentine, heated almost to boiling, and draw it gently over both sides of the paper, taking care to keep it warm. This operation must be repeated, according to the quantity of oily substance imbibed by the paper. When the oil is fully removed, if the paper should have lost any of its original whiteness, dip another brush in highly rectified spirits of wine and draw it in a like manner over the discoloration, particularly around the edges. If these simple means are used with proper precautions, the spots will entirely dissappear and the paper resume its original whiteness, without any alteration of the appearance of the ink."

Who but an author, a bibliophile, a bibliopolist, reader, student and dreamer could be more interested in the preservation of old books, pamphlets, articles, notes and manuscripts? Alsop was all of these, according to Mr. Harrington, and it is natural that he would incorporate any and all such lore in his efforts to hand down his own knowledge and the trials and tests of others, and to see that they were properly protected in book form.

You have been patient—just one more. If your lids are heavy with dull reading, snap them open, for here is one to test your knowledge of the English language and to sharpen your wits. That it is the work of a sportsman you will not doubt, for who else might be interested in cooking woodcock to resemble ebony—or is this what he means? Consult the illustration and your dictionary, the largest and most complete you can find, for I shall hope to have some comment on this recipe from some one of my readers who knows the art of ancient cookery.

"To eborize Woodcocks.

Cut in pieces two Woodcocks that have been half roasted, and put them in a stewpan with three quarters of a pint of gravy, an onion stuck with a few cloves, some pickled mushrooms, a small anchovy, a piece of butter rolled in flour, a blade of mace and pepper and salt to the taste. Let it simmer about fifteen minutes—but not boil—towards the end of which time put in half a pint of red wine. Serve up hot in a dish ornamented round the brim with paste. Observation—In all stews or sauces where wine is required, it should not be put in too early as the culinary heat would effectually dissipate the spirit."

No sooner is a bibliography completed than someone discovers a letter, a manuscript, a pamphlet or a volume that upsets the most accurate research. In the matter of Richard Alsop's *Universal Receipt Book*, I feel that I have proven conclusively (at least to myself) his right to authorship. I have taken upon myself the task of proving it to the world of American Letters. It is possible that among the papers and effects of John Trumbull, Timothy Dwight, Joel Barlow or David Humphreys may lie a long forgotten calf bound manuscript notebook just like the one written by Mr. Alsop. Perhaps in the archives of the New York Historical Society there is a booklet or ancient ledger kept by Dr. Samuel L. Mitchill, or Philip Freneau or Charles Brockden Brown, or one of the other members of the New York Literati, all of whom Richard Alsop numbered among his friends. If someone with the time and energy should decide to refute these short notes, who knows what might happen? However, if I stimulate such enthusiasm, and lose the battle, I shall still be pleased to know that I have helped to name the members of the society of gentlemen and cleared up the matter once and for all. My fingers are crossed, and at least for the moment, Richard Alsop is the sole author of the *Universal Receipt Book!*

I can not close without a word to those unsympathetic souls whose reaction is "so what" or perhaps "who cares." If this be yours, then my friend, you picked up the wrong bedtime reading. The world of 1953 is full of war and bloodshed, political intrigue, murder and crime, atomic wonders, and a thousand other human interests. If you prefer them, they are yours for the asking. Many of us would like to change human nature. Many of us appreciate the past and its simplicity that, with its rugged effort, produced this master-mind present. The question as to who wrote a very small calf bound volume in 1814 is of small moment to most of us. To this majority thus addressed, I offer consolation in that even they will praise the attempt to return stolen property, be it the authorship of a book or a million dollar legacy. To the minority bibliophiles I make no apology for this invasion of their reading time and sincerely hope that these notes may prove to be an appetizer in the form of eborized woodcock to whet their appetites for future meals in research.

CURRENT EXHIBITIONS

Joseph Steward, Hartford Artist; Presidential Autographs; and Wedding Gowns.

Summer is a perfect time to visit our cool building. Museum open daily 1:00-5:00 P. M., 10-12:00 noon Saturdays.

The price of these Bulletins is ten cents each.